

VZCZCXYZ0003
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #3028/01 2450559
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 020559Z SEP 06
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1917
INFO RUEHB/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5610
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 6816

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 003028

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - DAVID FIRESTEIN
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: OPRC KMDR KPAO TW

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN'S UPCOMING TRIP TO SOUTH PACIFIC

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies gave extensive coverage September 1 to President Chen Shui-bian's upcoming overseas trip, which is slated for September 3; former DPP Chairman Shih Ming-teh's campaign to oust President Chen, of which some warm-up activities will kick off this evening; the Taipei District Court's ruling on the highway electronic toll collection system scandal case; and Taiwan-born Yankee pitcher Wang Chien-ming. The pro-unification "United Daily News" ran a front-page banner headline that read "Bian Departs by Military Aircraft, Returns by China Airlines." The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, on the other hand, front-paged an exclusive news story with the headline "Chiang Kai-shek Airport Will Be Changed to Taiwan Taoyuan Airport."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" commented on President Chen's planned transit of Guam, saying Chen's major objective is actually to transit the United States, while his secondary objective is to cement Taiwan's relations with its allies. The article said it seems that the United States has no intention of seizing this opportunity to give Chen a hard time. A separate "Apple Daily" column also said it is understandable why Washington will not allow Taiwan's Air Force One to land in Guam, because it has become a habit for Chen to maneuver and toy with Taiwan's foreign relations as he did with every election. An opinion piece in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," however, criticized the "Chen-haters" for smearing President Chen's diplomatic agenda and sabotaging Taiwan's diplomatic efforts.
End summary.

A) "Bian's Dream of Guam"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] editorialized (9/1):

"President Chen is about to repeat the odyssey he made in May, visiting Palau and Nauru this time. In reality, A-Bian is acting with a hidden motive: His major objective is to transit the United States, while his secondary objective is to consolidate Taiwan's relations with its allies. It is a pity that the United States would not allow the Air Force One he will be aboard to transit Guam; only a commercial airplane will be allowed to land in Guam.

"The U.S. concern is that Air Force One symbolizes the presidency of a sovereign nation, which would send China off into hysterics, and the United States does not see the need to offend China for A-Bian. Commercial planes, on the other hand, represent civilians, and are thus irrelevant to the controversy over sovereignty. It seems that the United States has no intention of hitting a man when he is down - that is, to seize this opportunity to torture A-Bian."

B) "Sad Departure"

Columnist Antonio Chiang commented in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (9/1):

"Three months ago, A-Bian was in discord with Washington over his transit of the U.S., causing unnecessary harm to the mutual trust between Taiwan and the United States. This time, he was mildly rebuffed again by the U.S. over his transit of Guam. A-Bian keeps on creating questions to test Washington's patience towards him. Just on the eve when one million people are about to gather to oust him, he is using Taiwan-U.S. relations as stakes; he seems to have gone too far again.

"The two allies that he is going to visit have a total population of less than 30,000. Not a single soul in the world would believe that he is traveling to strive for Taiwan's foreign relations this time; not even he himself dares to claim that he is traveling overseas for Taiwan's sake. It is quite easy to understand that Uncle Sam does not want A-Bian to take 'Air Force One' and land it on U.S. territory, because he is maneuvering and toying with foreign relations as he did with the elections, and it has grown into a habit. The more he travels overseas, the more harm it does to Taiwan's image in the international community.

"As it stands now, no matter where he goes, he cannot dodge the ruthless criticism shooting towards him from all sides. Every time he opens his mouth to speak, even if he does not misspeak, his remarks are interpreted either excessively or out of context. But A-Bian can never control his mouth; especially at this moment when his body and mind are out of balance, whatever he says is sure to hurt himself. ..."

C) "Diplomatic Needs Hurt by Domestic Politicking"

Liu Kuan-teh, a Taipei-based political commentator, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation:

30,000] (9/1):

"... Shih's camp has urged Chen to cancel his diplomatic agenda, as well as the pan-blue camp's sabotaging of Taiwan's diplomatic efforts, are nonsense. They ignore the increasing imbalance between Taiwan and China in terms of diplomatic strength. The timing of Chen's tour of the South Pacific is significant in a strategic way, given that Beijing bought off former ally Chad early last month. The fact that China has reached out to the world and exerted increasing influence in global affairs in recent years through frequent state visits to its allies constitutes a tremendous challenge to Taiwan's already-fragile foreign relations. ...

"Chen's trip has two important functions. One is to correct any perception that opposition kowtowing to Beijing is representative of public opinion in this country. It is necessary for the government to launch an extensive international campaign to counter Beijing's divide-and-conquer strategy. More importantly, Taiwan must develop a new foreign policy agenda in reaction to China's incorporation of 'great nation diplomacy.' ..."

YOUNG